

ASSIMILATION OF PERSIAN CULTURE WITH ETHNICITIES IN SOUTH SULAWESI

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**ABSTRACT**

Common saying mention that Islamic assimilation in ethnicities living in South Sulawesi was primarily introduced by Arabian scholars. This study has been focused on the other side of this saying. It could be also much influenced by the Persian culture which was brought to the region earlier than the Arabic and Gujarati cultures. This side is based on the historical fact that Sayyid Jamaluddin, a Persian Scholar, came to Tosora-Wajo in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It means that the people were already familiar with Islam prior to the arrival of Datuk Ribandang during the golden age of the Tallo Empire in 1605. Evidence of the works of Persian scholars has also contributed to the enrichment of culture in South Sulawesi. In this connection, the process of cultural assimilation will be examined through various aspects: (1) Apparent cultural organizations, oral tradition and *tasawuf*; (2) social behaviors such as cultural celebrations of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, *Ashura*, and *Assikalaibineng*; and (3) existing artifacts, which can be witnessed in the architectural mosques equipped with twelve windows and two main gates. Those aspects give strong evidences that the Persian culture has been assimilated to the culture prior to the arrival of Arabian and Gujarati Scholars.

**KEYWORDS:** Cultural Assimilation, Persian Culture, Islam, *Tasawuf*, *Ashura*, *Maulid*, *Assikalaibineng*.

**I. INTRODUCTION**

It is a common belief that South Sulawesi's ethnicities assimilated with Islamic values and teachings. However, there can be no denial that they had also assimilated with Hindu, Buddha and Western cultures. This article attempts to provide a nuanced analysis on the different kinds of Islamic cultures that had made their mark and influence on various ethnicities in South Sulawesi. This would entail an analysis on various assimilation processes that involved Arabic, Gujarati and Persian cultures.

The significance of this study lies in the effort to counter the common perception among the peoples of South Sulawesi, and perhaps elsewhere, that Islamic influence on the traditional ethnicities in the peninsula was solely derived from Arabia, undermining the vast

impacts of other kinds of Islamic influence, most notably the Persian. In South Sulawesi, all Islamic cultures is understood and claimed as the Islamic Arabic influence, or presented by the Arabic man. The peoples of South Sulawesi especially the muslim haven't known the Islamic Persian culture.

There are some reasons behind the fact. First, Islamic exclusive view which considers Islam is equivalent with Arabian. Second, the Persian scholars, in diffusing Islam preferred to use Arabic language, as consequence people knew and claimed them as Arab. Third, the Persian people, in terms of physical appearance are similar with the Arab people. Fourth, the high-rank individuals, such as king, scholar, historian, and religious leader had a strong contribution to support this anomaly and deviation.

As an example, not many people aware that Sayid Jamaluddin Husein Al-Akbar is a Persian. He was born in Samarkhand, Persia. According to Martin Van Bruinessen (1995) that children of Syah Ahmad, Jamaluddin and his brothers, had allegedly wandered to Southeast Asia. Jamaluddin, at first, trampled his feet in Kamboja and Aceh. Then he sailed to Semarang and spent many years in Java Island. Finally he continued his traveling to Bugis Island and lived there until he died. By told a story, he diffused Islam to Indonesia with his family's caravan. His son, Sayid Ibrahim (Maulana Malik Ibrahim) remained in Aceh to educate the people about Islamic teachings. Afterward, Sayid Jamaluddin went to Majapahit Empire. Then moved to the Bugis land, and he died in Wajo (South Sulawesi). He arrived in Bugis land in 1452 and passed away on 1453.<sup>1</sup> Uka Tjandrasasmita, an Indonesian prominent historian, estimated that Sayid Jamaluddin entered Tosora-Wajo in the middle of 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> According to Graaf and Pigeaud that Sayid Jamaluddin was a legendary Islamic holy man and also known as a sacred scholar of Islam.<sup>3</sup>

In other version, based on my interview with Amir Djumbia, Publication Staff of Ancient Inheritance Conservation Office of Makassar, several years ago a Persian muslim who visited the eastern part of Indonesia confirmed that Sayid Jamaluddin indeed visited Sulawesi and that he was a Persian. He (the Persian muslim) said that in South Sulawesi, there were some Muslims around 2 Hijriah. He also informed about the attendance of Islam among the South Sulawesi people. According to him, Islam in South Sulawesi was propagated by Sayid Jamaluddin who came from Aceh by way of Java (Padjadjaran). Sayid Jamaluddin came to Java on grounds of Prabu Wijaya's invitation. Prabu Wijaya ruled Padjadjaran from 1293 to 1309. Sayyid Jamaluddin continued his journey together with 15

entourages to South Sulawesi. They came into the Bugis region and stayed in Tosora-Wajo and passed away there around 1320 M.

The data above showed that the Persian Islam has indeed existed and has been assimilated into the livelihood and culture of the peoples in South Sulawesi. This assimilation was presented by Sayid Jamaluddin who was born in Persia as well as by Datuk Ribandang, Datuk Patimang, Datuk Ditiro who were born in Sumatera. They came to Tallo Harbor, South Sulawesi in 1605.<sup>4</sup>

But awareness of and confidence in the influence of Persian culture grew stronger in the minds and hearts of the public after they witnessed the victory and triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran. Before that the people of South Sulawesi have never known the greatness of Persian culture and also a Shiite Islamic sect in Islam. If there is someone who knows Iran and the Shiites, they knew him as a dangerous country and schools for the people and Islam. So the result for society is that they do not have the courage to say that the influence of Persian culture in South Sulawesi. Therefore, this paper discusses and demonstrates the influence of Persian culture in South Sulawesi

## **II. Cases, Objectives and Methods**

This paper will focus on the Persian cultural assimilation affecting the culture of South Sulawesi ethnics, especially in Bugis-Makassar ethnics, and select Wajo Regency as the main field of study due to the fact that this was place where Sayid Jamaluddin came for the first time in Bugis-Makassar region, while other regions merely served as comparison to the main focus of the study.

The objective of this paper is to identify the kinds of the Persian cultural assimilation on the culture of South Sulawesi and explain the meaning.

This case study was constructed using literature research and in-depth interviews with community leaders of Cikoang, Tosora and some of Islamic scholars in South Sulawesi.

## **III. Results and Discussion**

According to Herudjati Purwoko(2003) that there are three of the material cultures, namely: Organizational Culture, Act Culture, and Artifact Culture.<sup>5</sup> Concerning the analysis and results of this paper are following:

## A. Organizational Culture:

### 1. Language and Literature

Christian Pelras in '*Manusia Bugis*' explained that the word '*Waju*' in Bugis language means 'clothes', and it was originated from the Persian word, '*Bazu*'.<sup>6</sup> Bazu in Persian is 'arm'.

According to Muhammad Buya Nasir Taraweh and Ambo Tang, Islamic scholars from the name of Belawa sub-district, in district Wajo, that Belawa is derived from 'baa' and 'alawi'. Ba, in Persian, means 'together with' and 'Alawi' is the calling for the descendants of Prophet Muhammad. Sayid Jamaluddin is descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Thus, 'Belawa' means being together with the prophet descendants. Sayid Jamaluddin propagated the teachings of Islam in Belawa.

In the Islamic Persia belief that following and becoming the family of the prophet Muhammad as a leader is indispensable. The famous saying of Prophet Muhammad;" Verily, I am leaving behind two precious things among you: Book of Allah and my kin, for indeed, the two will never separate until they come back to me by the Pond on the Day of Judgment."

That is why after visiting of Sayid Jamaluddin, the content of literature of South Sulawesi were mostly portraying the figures of Ali bin Abi Thalib, Fatimah Az-Zahra, Hassan and Hussein. For example: *Daramatasia* Story, War Poem of Makassar (*Syair Perang Mengkasar*), *Assikalabineang*, and so forth.

### 2. *Tasawwuf* (Esoteric Dimension of Islam)

The biggest *tharekat* in South Sulawesi is Khalwatiyah that has a doctrine is the unity of being. Being is the unknowable and inaccessible ground of everything that exists. God alone is true being, while all things dwell in nonexistence. Being alone is non-delimited, while everything else is constrained, confined, and constricted.<sup>7</sup> The great sufi master of the unity of being teaching was Hussein Ibn Mansyur Al-Hallaj.<sup>8</sup>

*Sulapa Eppa* (four sides) is a real form of manifesting the unity of existence concept in the tradition of people of South Sulawesi. This *Sulapa Eppa* concept could be applied into various cases, such as: Firstly, Lontara (Bugis-Makassar alphabet). *Sulapa Eppa* concept is based on Bugis-Makassar myth and world view where they believe that this universe as one in unity of being which is expressed by symbol  $\diamond = \text{sa}$ , it means  $\diamond = \text{seua}$  (one). Symbol  $\diamond$  is a microcosm of the human body. On the top part is head, on the left side and the right are hands, and on the under is leg. The head part is called "saung"  $\diamond$  that means mouth. Mouth is

part for expressing everything, that is  $\diamond$ =sound. The sound is constructed so that it has a meaning (symbols), it is called  $\diamond$  = ada (divine word). From word  $\diamond$  (ada) goes out everything which covers all cosmos orderly. If the word (ada) is added up an article  $\diamond$  = E, it becomes  $\diamond$  adae (that word). This is the source of the word  $\diamond$  = ade' (traditional law), namely divine word or arranging properly, making orderly, controlling, disciplining which cover all universe  $\diamond$  = sa.<sup>9</sup>

Secondly, Sulapa Eppa is also philosophically applied in architecture of house. The Bugis-Makassar traditional house is inspired by the cosmos structure where the universe divided into three parts; first, the top universe part is the sacred place, second, the middle universe part is the place for human life interaction, and third, the low universe part is the place for the living creature interaction with its environment.

When the people of South Sulawesi want to build a house, they need to request some considerations from 'Panrita Bola' (the expert of house), such as: looking for location and a good direction. The good directions are, namely: facing to the rising sun direction, facing to the highland area, and facing to the one of wind direction, including for choosing a good time. They also believe on 'Posi Bola' (Middle or Navel of the house) which must be first determined than the other three pillars before other parts were constructed.

Thirdly, Sulapa Eppa is the living philosophy of the traditional people of South Sulawesi. A view of ontology is to comprehend the universe universally. Sulapa Eppa as the philosophy of life is considered as the myth of the origin of human creation which consists of soil, water, fire and wind. These fourth elements couldn't be separated for constructing a perfect man.

Fourthly, Sulapa Eppa is also to understand a relation balancing within four dimensions in our life, namely: The harmonious relationship of human being with God, society, nature, and government

The concept of Sulapa Eppa's relation recognizes no one on the dominant position. All of them are in an equal relation with each other. The main key for applying and practicing them is *assedingengnge* (cohesiveness). As a model of cohesiveness, in the tradition of Bugis-Makassar, is declaring a vow in front of public between the people and the king.<sup>10</sup>

The life attitude is upholding which expected to be a personality for every Bugis and Makassar man, especially for the state apparatus (*Pakkatenni' Ade'*) which is most emphasized in Sulapa Eppa concept are; *Malampu* (honesty and integrity), *Acca na Warani* (cleverness and braveness), *Temmapasilengeng* (justice), *Reso* (ethos of work).

With the cultural wisdom as mentioned above, if we apply and improve in our life will set up the balanced and visible life. Thus, it's most relevant with the concept of humanosphere argued by Dadang Ahmad Suriamiharja as harmonious relation between human being with his/her environment. In the same way, Kaoru Sugihara presented that if we wish to understand how humans have coexisted with nature in the past, and could do so in the future, at a general level of abstraction, it is necessary to study how humans have come to terms with the tropical environment and built a living environment (humanosphere) for increasingly large population, by fighting with the threat of epidemic disease, by domesticating plants and animals, and by securing drinking water and heat energy.<sup>11</sup> In fact, *Sulapa Eppa* is a concept that not only narrates and embodies all those aspects but also sacred things that must be treated, cultivated and dignified because, all of them in the Persian and Bugis Muslim belief are as an attributes of God.<sup>12</sup>

### **3. Oral Tradition**

Oral tradition is one of the most popular of literature genre in Persia. It has the most important role in developing the written Persian epic. 'Shahnameh' is one of evidence. Shahnameh was written by Abul Qasim Firdausi (c.1000 CE) using the ancient legendary materials which the Persian people often narrated either with musical narration or not. For the Iranian people indeed live in and by means of their poets; and the importance of the poems of Firdausi for the preservation of the Iranian character can in no way be overestimated.<sup>17</sup>

Oral tradition in South Sulawesi is also popular, but there is a little difference with Persia. In Persia, oral tradition is done by all people and until now is still going on and known by the people while in Bugis, it can be done only by special person, for example, *Pansirrili* and *Bissu*.

In addition to the rich oral tradition of the Bugis, origin narratives have been recorded on lontara palm leaves since around sixteenth century. One such recorded narrative told about Sawerigading and We Cudai.

When Islam came into life of South Sulawesi peoples, the content of narration changed to Islamic narration. This Islamic narration is intended to narrate the life of Ali bin Abi Thalib and Fatimah Az-zahra. Both of them were perfect symbol of human as a person as well as a husband-wife, father-mother, boy-girl, child. Becoming Ali-Fatimah as a perfect model for human life in Islamic view is a main teaching of Persian Islam. Following is one of

example: The fourth mate is His Majesty Ali// He is a son-in law of the prophet Muhammad//His strong is matchless//The Lion of God is his nickname//.<sup>18</sup>

## **B. Behavior:**

### **1. Celebrating 'Maudu Lompoo' in Cikoang, Takalar**

An outstanding treasure, a truly beautiful expression devoted to the blessed memory of the Mawlid prophet Muhammad, his birthday. All muslims have always celebrated Mawlid functions in the month of Rabi al-Awwal. They always gave charity in the nights of that month and expressed their happiness. It is a common practice of Muslims that they particularly make mention events of those incidents which are related to the birth of Rasool-Allah.

Mawlid is a yearly festival celebrated in many muslims regions by presenting ritual meals and reciting special prayers recounting the life of the prophet Muhammad, the latter known as Barzanji.

For the muslims in Cikoang, according to Muhammad Adlin Sila (2001) that Maulid Nabi, locally called Maudu' is a ritual feasting. It is said to have been first conducted on the 8<sup>th</sup> of *rabiul-awwal* 1041 H (1620 AD), primarily pioneered by Sayyid Jalal al-Din in conjunction with I-Bunrang (a local), and was performed in I-Bunrang's house. At that time, Sayyid Jalal al-Din asked for I Bunrang's assistance to provide ten liters of rice, forty chickens and 120 chickens or duck eggs for forty guests. Thus on this first occasion there were forty *kanre Maudu'* (Maudu' food, put in a bamboo basket) altogether. In the following year, on the 12<sup>th</sup> Rabi'ul Awwal 1042 H (1621 AD), the number of participants increased greatly. Every participant representing his household was therefore asked to prepare *Kanre Maudu'*, the preparation being known as *Maudu' Caddi* (the smaller Maulid), under the guidance of its own *anrongguru* (religious specialist). The *kanre' Maudu'* consists of four liters of rice, one chicken, one coconut for each household and at least one egg for each member of the household.<sup>19</sup>

Further, Sila said that the *maudu'* festival consist of two stages, the first being the *Maudu' Caddi*, where each household makes a *Kanre Maudu'* in their own house, and the second being the *Maudu' Lompoo*, a ritual meal where the *Kanre Maudu'* prepared by each household of the al-Aidid clan are gathered publicly at the edge of the estuary of the Cikoang River.<sup>20</sup>



There are several petty boats used for the *Maudu' Lompoo*, locally called '*Julung-julung*' (literally meaning the jamming together of two petty boats as in a pair) in which *Kanre Maudu'* are placed collectively. This *julung-julung* is then placed in a real boat. The number of *julung-julung* indicates the number of marriages in the Sayyid family conducted throughout the year. Thus, *julung-julung* are also called *bunting beru* (literally meaning newly married couples).<sup>21</sup>

The religious reason for using boats in the ritual is based on expression of Prophet Muhammad comparing his kin to Noah's ark. He said, "My family among you is like Noah's ark. He who sails in it will be safe, but he who holds back from it will perish."

## **2. Celebrating Ashura**

*Ashura*, is the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the Muslim month of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar. On *Ashura* in 680, Husayn, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad was killed during the battle of Karbala- Iraq, which opposed supporters of Husayn to those of Yazid , Muawiyah's son.

Husayn's death in several sects' opinions is an event locked neither in time nor in place, but reflective of any community that considers itself oppressed, persecuted or humiliated. In the early days of the Iranian revolution in 1979, and again during the Iran-Iraq war a frequent slogan in Iranian streets and on Iranian broadcasts read, "Every day is Ashura, every place is Karbala, and every month is Muharram."

On this special day in South Sulawesi, Muslims will cook a special porridge known as the Ashura Porridge ("*Bubur Asyura*") to be distributed mainly to the poor and the needy. This *bubur asyura* is normally cooked in big pots at the house of the high ranking person or mosques in a joint community effort by the residents, and each household will get a helping of the porridge. The poor, orphans and vagrants are specially invited to come and they are given generous portions of this porridge, being a special day in Islam.

## **3. Assikalaibineng (Etiquette of Having Sexual Intercourse)**

Assikalaibineng (Etiquette of having sexual intercourse) in the tradition of the muslim of South Sulawesi is not just for releasing of married couple's libido, but also, the intercourse essence of married couple is symbolically religious act on behalf of Ali and Fatimah figure. And one of the identities of Islamic Persian culture is becoming Ali and Fatimah as religious or sacred symbol.



The meaning of this symbolic religiosity is to give spirit and essence for married couple intercourse so that the married couple follow and obey to the rule and ethic which is done by the praiseworthy family: Ali and Fatimah. This intercourse becomes an honorable deed if the married couples do an intercourse belonging to spirit and principle of Islam as Ali and Fatimah did.

Therefore, the tradition of muslim in South Sulawesi before doing an intercourse for the first time have to do what is called '*Nikah Bathin*' (Inner Marriage). Concerning the rule of inner marriage is: "...say salute." Assalamu alaikum, Ali grasp, Fatimah is grasped." That is an obligatory rule belonging to behavior of Ali and Fatimah." <sup>22</sup>

### **C. Artifact:**

Tosora was as the first place where Sayyid Jamaluddin Akbar Al-Hussein arrived and stayed in Bugis land. And based on explanation above, Sayyid Jamaluddin Akbar Al-Hussein, of course, had a strong influence and big followers in Tosora. He left many important artifacts to this region including the architecture of the mosque with 12 (twelve) windows and 2 (two) main gates style.

Two main gates mean two safe ways. According to Islamic Persian, which Sayid Jamaluddin believed, that Prophet Muhammad - may Allah bestow peace and benedictions upon him and his pure Progeny - said: "Verily, I am leaving behind two precious things among you: the Book of Allah and my kin, my household Ahlul Bayt, for indeed, the two will never separate until they come back to me by the Pond of Judgment"

Twelve (12) windows are also based on saying of the Prophet Muhammad, "There will be twelve Muslim rulers." That is why we believe that the Holy Prophet did nominate his successor and Imam of the Muslims. The first one would be Ali and the last one the promised Mehdi (A). <sup>23</sup>

### **IV. Concluding Remark**

The assimilation of Persian culture with the ethnics in South Sulawesi couldn't be denied. There are many clear evidences of the assimilation especially in the Islamic culture of South Sulawesi, such as in the literature and language, tasawwuf and philosophy, celebrating religious matters, so forth.

What is more, based on mentioned above, we can make a conclusion that the Persian culture is coming earlier in South Sulawesi than the other Islamic color such as Arab or Gujarati. It can be signed with the coming of the Persian Muslim in South Sulawesi, Sayid Jamaludin Hussein Al-Kubra, approximately 300 years earlier than Datuk Ribandang, Datuk Patimang, and Datuk Ditiro who are known as Islam disseminator in South Sulawesi.

The method which was used by Sayid Jamaluddin to introduce Persian Islam culture to the people of South Sulawesi was developing the local culture with a new, better and more enlightening belief.

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